ULTIMA THULE

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HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

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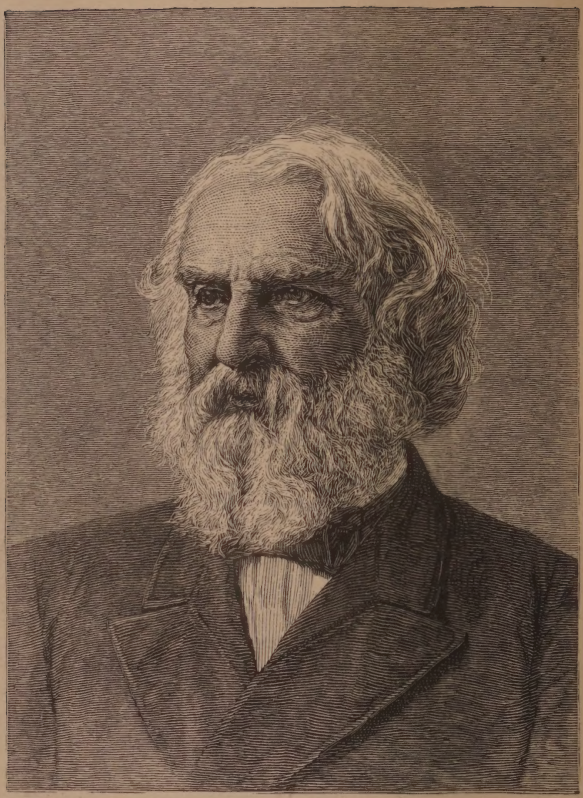

ULTIMA THULE

BY

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

Precor, integrâ
Cum mente, nec turpem senectam
Degere, nec citharâ carentem.

HORACE

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DEDICATION.

DEDICATION.

TO G. W. G.

WITH favoring winds, o'er sunlit seas,
We sailed for the Hesperides,
The land where golden apples grow;
But that, ah! that was long ago.

How far, since then, the ocean streams
Have swept us from that land of dreams,
That land of fiction and of truth,
The lost Atlantis of our youth!

Whither, ah, whither? Are not these
The tempest-haunted Hebrides,
Where sea-gulls scream, and breakers roar,
And wreck and sea-weed line the shore?

Ultima Thule! Utmost Isle!
Here in thy harbors for a while
We lower our sails; a while we rest
From the unending, endless quest.

POEMS.

BAYARD TAYLOR.

DEAD he lay among his books!
The peace of God was in his looks.

As the statues in the gloom
Watch o'er Maximilian's tomb,[1]

So those volumes from their shelves
Watched him, silent as themselves.

Ah! his hand will nevermore
Turn their storied pages o'er;

Nevermore his lips repeat
Songs of theirs, however sweet.

[1] In the Hofkirche at Innsbruck.

Let the lifeless body rest!
He is gone, who was its guest;

Gone, as travellers haste to leave
An inn, nor tarry until eve.

Traveller! in what realms afar,
In what planet, in what star,

In what vast, aerial space,
Shines the light upon thy face?

In what gardens of delight
Rest thy weary feet to-night?

Poet! thou, whose latest verse
Was a garland on thy hearse;

Thou hast sung, with organ tone,
In Deukalion's life, thine own;

On the ruins of the Past
Blooms the perfect flower at last.

Friend! but yesterday the bells
Rang for thee their loud farewells;

And to-day they toll for thee,
Lying dead beyond the sea;

Lying dead among thy books,
The peace of God in all thy looks!

THE CHAMBER OVER THE GATE.

Is it so far from thee
Thou canst no longer see,
In the Chamber over the Gate,
That old man desolate,
Weeping and wailing sore
For his son, who is no more?
O Absalom, my son!

Is it so long ago
That cry of human woe
From the walled city came,
Calling on his dear name,
That it has died away
In the distance of to-day?
O Absalom, my son!

There is no far or near,
There is neither there nor here,
There is neither soon nor late,
In that Chamber over the Gate,
Nor any long ago
To that cry of human woe,
  O Absalom, my son!

From the ages that are past
The voice sounds like a blast,
Over seas that wreck and drown,
Over tumult of traffic and town;
And from ages yet to be
Come the echoes back to me,
  O Absalom, my son!

Somewhere at every hour
The watchman on the tower
Looks forth, and sees the fleet
Approach of the hurrying feet

Of messengers, that bear
The tidings of despair.
O Absalom, my son!

He goes forth from the door,
Who shall return no more.
With him our joy departs;
The light goes out in our hearts;
In the Chamber over the Gate
We sit disconsolate.
O Absalom, my son!

That 'tis a common grief
Bringeth but slight relief;
Ours is the bitterest loss,
Ours is the heaviest cross;
And forever the cry will be
"Would God I had died for thee,
O Absalom, my son!"

FROM MY ARM-CHAIR.

TO THE CHILDREN OF CAMBRIDGE,

Who presented to me, on my Seventy-second Birthday, February 27, 1879, this Chair made from the Wood of the Village Blacksmith's Chestnut Tree.

Am I a king, that I should call my own
This splendid ebon throne?
Or by what reason, or what right divine,
Can I proclaim it mine?

Only, perhaps, by right divine of song
It may to me belong;
Only because the spreading chestnut tree
Of old was sung by me.

Well I remember it in all its prime,
When in the summer-time

The affluent foliage of its branches made
A cavern of cool shade.

There, by the blacksmith's forge, beside the street,
Its blossoms white and sweet
Enticed the bees, until it seemed alive,
And murmured like a hive.

And when the winds of autumn, with a shout,
Tossed its great arms about,
The shining chestnuts, bursting from the sheath,
Dropped to the ground beneath.

And now some fragments of its branches bare,
Shaped as a stately chair,
Have by my hearthstone found a home at last,
And whisper of the past.

The Danish king could not in all his pride
Repel the ocean tide,
But, seated in this chair, I can in rhyme
Roll back the tide of Time.

I see again, as one in vision sees,
The blossoms and the bees,
And hear the children's voices shout and call,
And the brown chestnuts fall.

I see the smithy with its fires aglow,
I hear the bellows blow,
And the shrill hammers on the anvil beat
The iron white with heat!

And thus, dear children, have ye made for me
This day a jubilee,
And to my more than three-score years and ten
Brought back my youth again.

The heart hath its own memory, like the mind,
And in it are enshrined
The precious keepsakes, into which is wrought
The giver's loving thought.

Only your love and your remembrance could
Give life to this dead wood,
And make these branches, leafless now so long,
Blossom again in song.

JUGURTHA.

How cold are thy baths, Apollo!
  Cried the African monarch, the splendid,
As down to his death in the hollow
  Dark dungeons of Rome he descended,
  Uncrowned, unthroned, unattended;
How cold are thy baths, Apollo!

How cold are thy baths, Apollo!
  Cried the Poet, unknown, unbefriended,
As the vision, that lured him to follow,
  With the mist and the darkness blended,
  And the dream of his life was ended;
How cold are thy baths, Apollo!

THE IRON PEN,

Made from a fetter of Bonnivard, the Prisoner of Chillon; the handle of wood from the Frigate Constitution, and bound with a circlet of gold, inset with three precious stones from Siberia, Ceylon, and Maine.

I THOUGHT this Pen would arise
From the casket where it lies —
  Of itself would arise and write
My thanks and my surprise.

When you gave it me under the pines,
I dreamed these gems from the mines
  Of Siberia, Ceylon, and Maine
Would glimmer as thoughts in the lines;

That this iron link from the chain
Of Bonnivard might retain

Some verse of the Poet who sang
Of the prisoner and his pain ;

That this wood from the frigate's mast
Might write me a rhyme at last,
As it used to write on the sky
The song of the sea and the blast.

But motionless as I wait,
Like a Bishop lying in state
Lies the Pen, with its mitre of gold,
And its jewels inviolate.

Then must I speak, and say
That the light of that summer day
In the garden under the pines
Shall not fade and pass away.

I shall see you standing there,
Caressed by the fragrant air,

With the shadow on your face,
And the sunshine on your hair.

I shall hear the sweet low tone
Of a voice before unknown,
Saying, "This is from me to you—
From me, and to you alone."

And in words not idle and vain
I shall answer and thank you again
For the gift, and the grace of the gift,
O beautiful Helen of Maine!

And forever this gift will be
As a blessing from you to me,
As a drop of the dew of your youth
On the leaves of an aged tree.

ROBERT BURNS.

I SEE amid the fields of Ayr
A ploughman, who, in foul and fair,
Sings at his task
So clear, we know not if it is
The laverock's song we hear, or his,
Nor care to ask.

For him the ploughing of those fields
A more ethereal harvest yields
Than sheaves of grain;
Songs flush with purple bloom the rye,
The plover's call, the curlew's cry,
Sing in his brain.

Touched by his hand, the wayside weed
Becomes a flower; the lowliest reed
Beside the stream
Is clothed with beauty; gorse and grass
And heather, where his footsteps pass,
The brighter seem.

He sings of love, whose flame illumes
The darkness of lone cottage rooms;
He feels the force,
The treacherous undertow and stress
Of wayward passions, and no less
The keen remorse.

At moments, wrestling with his fate,
His voice is harsh, but not with hate;
The brush-wood, hung
Above the tavern door, lets fall
Its bitter leaf, its drop of gall
Upon his tongue.

But still the music of his song
Rises o'er all elate and strong;
Its master-chords
Are Manhood, Freedom, Brotherhood,
Its discords but an interlude
Between the words.

And then to die so young and leave
Unfinished what he might achieve!
Yet better sure
Is this, than wandering up and down
An old man in a country town,
Infirm and poor.

For now he haunts his native land
As an immortal youth; his hand
Guides every plough;
He sits beside each ingle-nook,
His voice is in each rushing brook
Each rustling bough.

His presence haunts this room to night,
A form of mingled mist and light
From that far coast.
Welcome beneath this roof of mine!
Welcome! this vacant chair is thine,
Dear guest and ghost!

HELEN OF TYRE.

WHAT phantom is this that appears
Through the purple mists of the years,
    Itself but a mist like these?
A woman of cloud and of fire;
It is she; it is Helen of Tyre,
    The town in the midst of the seas.

O Tyre! in thy crowded streets
The phantom appears and retreats,
    And the Israelites that sell
Thy lilies and lions of brass,
Look up as they see her pass,
    And murmur "Jezebel!"

Then another phantom is seen
At her side, in a gray gabardine,
With beard that floats to his waist;
It is Simon Magus, the Seer;
He speaks, and she pauses to hear
The words he utters in haste.

He says: "From this evil fame,
From this life of sorrow and shame,
I will lift thee and make thee mine;
Thou hast been Queen Candace,
And Helen of Troy, and shalt be
The Intelligence Divine!"

Oh, sweet as the breath of morn,
To the fallen and forlorn
Are whispered words of praise;
For the famished heart believes
The falsehood that tempts and deceives,
And the promise that betrays.

So she follows from land to land
The wizard's beckoning hand,
    As a leaf is blown by the gust,
Till she vanishes into night.
O reader, stoop down and write
    With thy finger in the dust.

O town in the midst of the seas,
With thy rafts of cedar trees,
    Thy merchandise and thy ships,
Thou, too, art become as naught,
A phantom, a shadow, a thought,
    A name upon men's lips.

ELEGIAC.

DARK is the morning with mist; in the narrow mouth of the harbor
Motionless lies the sea, under its curtain of cloud;
Dreamily glimmer the sails of ships on the distant horizon,
Like to the towers of a town, built on the verge of the sea.

Slowly and stately and still, they sail forth into the ocean;
With them sail my thoughts over the limitless deep,
Farther and farther away, borne on by unsatisfied longings,
Unto Hesperian isles, unto Ausonian shores.

Now they have vanished away, have disappeared in the ocean;
Sunk are the towers of the town into the depths of the sea!
All have vanished but those that, moored in the neighboring roadstead,
Sailless at anchor ride, looming so large in the mist.

Vanished, too, are the thoughts, the dim, unsatisfied longings;
Sunk are the turrets of cloud into the ocean of dreams;
While in a haven of rest my heart is riding at anchor,
Held by the chains of love, held by the anchors of trust!

OLD ST. DAVID'S AT RADNOR.

WHAT an image of peace and rest
  Is this little church among its graves!
All is so quiet; the troubled breast,
The wounded spirit, the heart oppressed,
  Here may find the repose it craves.

See, how the ivy climbs and expands
  Over this humble hermitage,
And seems to caress with its little hands
The rough, gray stones, as a child that stands
  Caressing the wrinkled cheeks of age!

You cross the threshold; and dim and small
  Is the space that serves for the Shepherd's
    Fold;
The narrow aisle, the bare, white wall,

The pews, and the pulpit quaint and tall,
  Whisper and say: "Alas! we are old."

Herbert's chapel at Bemerton
  Hardly more spacious is than this;
But Poet and Pastor, blent in one,
Clothed with a splendor, as of the sun,
  That lowly and holy edifice.

It is not the wall of stone without
  That makes the building small or great,
But the soul's light shining round about,
And the faith that overcometh doubt,
  And the love that stronger is than hate.

Were I a pilgrim in search of peace,
  Were I a pastor of Holy Church,
More than a Bishop's diocese
Should I prize this place of rest, and release
  From farther longing and farther search.

Here would I stay, and let the world
  With its distant thunder roar and roll;
Storms do not rend the sail that is furled;
Nor like a dead leaf, tossed and whirled
  In an eddy of wind, is the anchored soul.

FOLK SONGS.

THE SIFTING OF PETER.

In St. Luke's Gospel we are told
How Peter in the days of old
Was sifted;
And now, though ages intervene,
Sin is the same, while time and scene
Are shifted.

Satan desires us, great and small,
As wheat to sift us, and we all
Are tempted;
Not one, however rich or great,
Is by his station or estate
Exempted.

No house so safely guarded is
But he, by some device of his,
Can enter;
No heart hath armor so complete
But he can pierce with arrows fleet
Its centre.

For all at last the cock will crow,
Who hear the warning voice, but go
Unheeding,
Till thrice and more they have denied
The Man of Sorrows, crucified
And bleeding.

One look of that pale suffering face
Will make us feel the deep disgrace
Of weakness;
We shall be sifted till the strength
Of self-conceit be changed at length
To meekness.

Wounds of the soul, though healed, will ache;
The reddening scars remain, and make
Confession;
Lost innocence returns no more;
We are not what we were before
Transgression.

But noble souls, through dust and heat,
Rise from disaster and defeat
The stronger,
And conscious still of the divine
Within them, lie on earth supine
No longer.

MAIDEN AND WEATHERCOCK.

MAIDEN.

O WEATHERCOCK on the village spire,
With your golden feathers all on fire,
Tell me, what can you see from your perch
Above there over the tower of the church?

WEATHERCOCK.

I can see the roofs and the streets below,
And the people moving to and fro,
And beyond, without either roof or street,
The great salt sea, and the fisherman's fleet.

I can see a ship come sailing in
Beyond the headlands and harbor of Lynn,

And a young man standing on the deck,
With a silken kerchief round his neck.

Now he is pressing it to his lips,
And now he is kissing his finger-tips,
And now he is lifting and waving his hand,
And blowing the kisses toward the land.

MAIDEN.

Ah, that is the ship from over the sea,
That is bringing my lover back to me,
Bringing my lover so fond and true,
Who does not change with the wind like
you.

WEATHERCOCK.

If I change with all the winds that blow,
It is only because they made me so,
And people would think it wondrous strange,
If I, a Weathercock, should not change.

O pretty Maiden, so fine and fair,
With your dreamy eyes and your golden hair,
When you and your lover meet to-day
You will thank me for looking some other way.

THE WINDMILL.

BEHOLD! a giant am I!
    Aloft here in my tower,
    With my granite jaws I devour
The maize, and the wheat, and the rye,
    And grind them into flour.

I look down over the farms;
    In the fields of grain I see
    The harvest that is to be,
And I fling to the air my arms,
    For I know it is all for me.

I hear the sound of flails
    Far off, from the threshing-floors
    In barns, with their open doors,

And the wind, the wind in my sails,
Louder and louder roars.

I stand here in my place,
With my foot on the rock below,
And whichever way it may blow
I meet it face to face,
As a brave man meets his foe.

And while we wrestle and strive
My master, the miller, stands
And feeds me with his hands;
For he knows who makes him thrive,
Who makes him lord of lands.

On Sundays I take my rest;
Church-going bells begin
Their low, melodious din;
I cross my arms on my breast,
And all is peace within.

THE TIDE RISES, THE TIDE FALLS.

THE tide rises, the tide falls,
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;
Along the sea-sands damp and brown
The traveller hastens toward the town,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea in the darkness calls and calls;
The little waves, with their soft, white hands,
Efface the footprints in the sands,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls

Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
The day returns, but nevermore
Returns the traveller to the shore,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

SONNETS.

MY CATHEDRAL.

LIKE two cathedral towers these stately pines
Uplift their fretted summits tipped with cones;
The arch beneath them is not built with stones,
Not Art but Nature traced these lovely lines,
And carved this graceful arabesque of vines;
No organ but the wind here sighs and moans,
No sepulchre conceals a martyr's bones,
No marble bishop on his tomb reclines.
Enter! the pavement, carpeted with leaves,
Gives back a softened echo to thy tread!
Listen! the choir is singing; all the birds,

In leafy galleries beneath the eaves,
Are singing! listen, ere the sound be fled,
And learn there may be worship without
words.

THE BURIAL OF THE POET.

RICHARD HENRY DANA.

In the old churchyard of his native town,
And in the ancestral tomb beside the wall,
We laid him in the sleep that comes to all,
And left him to his rest and his renown.
The snow was falling, as if Heaven dropped down
White flowers of Paradise to strew his pall; —
The dead around him seemed to wake, and call
His name, as worthy of so white a crown.
And now the moon is shining on the scene,
And the broad sheet of snow is written o'er

With shadows cruciform of leafless trees,
As once the winding-sheet of Saladin
With chapters of the Koran; but, ah! more
Mysterious and triumphant signs are these.

NIGHT.

INTO the darkness and the hush of night
Slowly the landscape sinks, and fades away,
And with it fade the phantoms of the day,
The ghosts of men and things, that haunt
the light.
The crowd, the clamor, the pursuit, the flight,
The unprofitable splendor and display,
The agitations, and the cares that prey
Upon our hearts, all vanish out of sight.
The better life begins; the world no more
Molests us; all its records we erase
From the dull common-place book of our
lives,

That like a palimpsest is written o'er
With trivial incidents of time and place,
And lo! the ideal, hidden beneath, revives

L'ENVOI.

L'ENVOI.

THE POET AND HIS SONGS.

As the birds come in the Spring,
  We know not from where;
As the stars come at evening
  From depths of the air;

As the rain comes from the cloud,
  And the brook from the ground;
As suddenly, low or loud,
  Out of silence a sound;

As the grape comes to the vine,
  The fruit to the tree;
As the wind comes to the pine,
  And the tide to the sea;

As come the white sails of ships
  O'er the ocean's verge;
As comes the smile to the lips,
  The foam to the surge;

So come to the Poet his songs,
  All hitherward blown
From the misty realm, that belongs
  To the vast Unknown.

His, and not his, are the lays
  He sings; and their fame
Is his, and not his; and the praise
  And the pride of a name.

For voices pursue him by day,
  And haunt him by night,
And he listens, and needs must obey,
  When the Angel says: "Write!"

END.

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